

Thomas B. Ellis

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Department of Philosophy and Religion
Appalachian State University
Boone, NC 28608
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Education

University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

Ph.D., Religious Studies, May 2002

Dissertation: "On Hindu Pilgrims and Cross-Cultural Pilgrimage: The Hermeneutics of Jarava Lal Mehta"

Advisors: Wilhem Halbfass, Fred Dallmayr, and Stephen Dunning

Concentrations: Hindu religions and philosophies, Postcolonial Theory, Philosophical Hermeneutics, and Comparative Philosophy of Religion

M.A., Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, 1996

Thesis: "On Buddhist Momentariness"

Advisor: Wilhelm Halbfass

University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC

B.A., Religious Studies, 1992

Thesis: "A Comparison of Advaita Vedanta and Visistadvaita Vedanta"

Advisor: Hal W. French

Employment

- Associate Professor of Religion, Department of Philosophy and Religion & Global Studies Faculty, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, July 2011 - present
- Assistant Professor of Religion, Department of Philosophy and Religion & Global Studies Faculty, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, August 2005 – June 2011
- Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, 2004-2005
- Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Religion, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA, 2002-2004
- Adjunct Professor of Anthropology, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA, 2001-2002
- Adjunct Professor of Religion, Department of Religion, Rutgers University, Camden, NJ, Spring 2000

- Instructor, Department of Religious Studies, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, 1997-2002
- Teaching Assistant, Department of South Asia Regional Studies, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, 1994-1995

Publications

2005. "Imagining a Theory: Questioning the Eschatological and Soteriological Motivations in Gananath Obeyesekere's *Imagining Karma*," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 19.2, 153-158.
2008. "The Meta-ethics of *Viraha Bhakti* in the Philosophical Writings of J. L. Mehta," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies*, 16:2, 71-91.
2008. "Of *And* and *Of*: The Politics of Grammar and the Study of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 20:3, 270-290.
2008. Review of Wei Zhang's *Heidegger, Rorty, and the Eastern Thinkers* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006) in *Sophia* 47, 253-255.
2008. "On Spirituality: Natural and Non-natural," *Religion Compass* 2:6, 1117-1138.
2009. "I Love You, I Hate You: Toward a Psychology of the Hindu *Deus Absconditus*," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 13:1, 1-23.
2009. "Natural Gazes, Non-natural Agents: The Biology of Religion's Ocular Behaviors" in *The Biology of Religious Behavior: The Evolutionary Origins of Faith and Religion*, ed. J. R. Feierman. Westport, CT.: Praeger Press
2009. "Teaching and Learning Guide for: On Spirituality: Natural and Non-natural," *Religion Compass* 3:6, 1042-1047.
2010. "On the Death of the Pilgrim: The Postcolonial Hermeneutics of Jarava Lal Mehta" in *Postcolonial Philosophy of Religion*, ed. by P. Bilimoria & A. B. Irvine. New York, NY: Springer
- 2011 "Disgusting Bodies, Disgusting Religion: The Biology of Tantra," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79:4, 879-927.
2011. "Chasing Cosmic Tennis Balls," *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 40:4, 11-14.
2012. "Growing Up amid the Religion and Science Affair," *Zygon* 47:3, 589-607.
2013. *On the Death of the Pilgrim: The Postcolonial Hermeneutics of Jarava Lal Mehta*. New York, NY: Springer.
- n.d. "Evoked *Puja*: The Behavioral Ecology of an Equatorial Ritual," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (under review).

n.d. "India and European Philosophy," *Routledge History of Indian Philosophy*, ed. by P. Bilimoria, R. King, and G. Petterson, Routledge, forthcoming

Works in Progress

Book: *Religious Terrorism: Its Nature and Function* – under contract, Toronto Studies in Religion Series, edited by Donald Wiebe, Peter Lang Publishing

Future projects

Article: "Paternity Certainty and Religion's Virgin Births"

Article: "Feminine Parthenogenesis, Scatology, and the New Psychology of Hinduism"

Article: "Blood Sacrifice and Immunocompetence"

Article: "The Illusion of Qualified Control"

Book: *Evoked Hinduism: The Behavioral Ecology of an Equatorial Religion*

Conference Presentations, Invited Lectures & Consultations

"Of Gods and Demons: Differential Cognition and the Perception of Control," national meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Boston, MA, Oct. 8-10, 2013.

"Free or Infected? Assessing the Costs of Our Riders," national meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Phoenix, AZ, Nov. 9-11, 2012.

"Nor In My Front Yard: Parasitology and the Absolutism of Sacred Place and Space," Humanities Forum, Appalachian State University, April 10, 2012.

"Like a Predator in the Night: Toward a Bio-psychology of Apocalyptic Fantasy," Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion annual meeting, Atlanta, GA, Mar. 3-5, 2012.

"Religion, Psychoneuroimmunology, and the Illusion of Qualified Control," national meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Milwaukee, WI, October 28-30, 2011.

"Toward a Natural History of Religion," Extended Learning Program, Appalachian State University, September 19, 2011

Panel Discussant, Taner Edis's *Science and Non-belief*, annual meeting of the Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion, Louisville, KY, March 4-6, 2011.

Roundtable Participant, "Religion, Science, and Society," Appalachian State University, March 2, 2011.

“Evoked Hinduism: The Evolutionary Psychology of *Puja*,” national meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Baltimore, MD, October 29-31, 2010

“Food, Sex, and Strangers: Hard Core Tantra and the Parasitological Other,” national meeting of the Society for Tantric Studies, Flagstaff, AZ, September 24-26, 2010

“In Search of ‘Hinduism’: Religions, Philosophies, and Cultures,” Senior Scholars Program, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, September 3, 2010

Presiding, Method and Theory I, annual meeting of the Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion, Atlanta, GA, March 5-7, 2010.

Panelist, Method and Theory II, annual meeting of the Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion, Atlanta, GA, March 5-7, 2010.

“The Evolutionary Psychology of *Puja*,” national meeting of the Dharma Association of North America, Montreal, Ont., Canada, Nov. 6-7, 2009.

“Disgusting Bodies, Disgusting Religion: The Biology of Tantra,” national meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Denver, CO, October 17-19, 2009.

“Disgusting Bodies, Disgusting Religion: Counterphobics and Tantra,” Humanities Forum, Appalachian State University, Feb. 19, 2009

“The Disgusting Divine: Tantra, Heroes, and Counterphobia,” national meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Chicago, IL, November 1-3, 2008

“Merged in or Separated by Oceans: Object Relations Theory and the Hindu God Image,” national meeting of the Dharma Association of North America, Chicago, IL, October 31-Nov. 1, 2008

“Darwinian Psychiatry, Paranoia, and the Evil Eye,” national meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Louisville, KY, October 17-19, 2008

“Natural Gazes, Non-natural Agents: The Biology of Religion’s Ocular Behaviors,” International Society for Human Ethology Conference, Bologna, Italy, July 12-17, 2008

“The Eyes Have It: On the Nature of Hindu Ocular Behaviors,” regional meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, Hilton Head, SC, January 18-20, 2008.

“Spirituality Redescribed, Self-esteem Misrecognized,” National meeting of the North American Association for the Study of Religion, San Diego, CA, Nov. 16-17, 2007

“Spirituality Reconsidered,” National meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Tampa, FL, Nov. 2-4, 2007

“Monstrous Others, Messianic Predators: The Other Other of the Attachment System and Its Implications for God Image Research,” National meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Portland, OR, Oct. 19-22, 2006

"Of Submissions, Prostrations, and Humiliations: The Ethological Origins for the Performance a Religious Intention and Its Violent Repercussions," National meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Portland, OR, Oct. 19-22, 2006

"Religion and Terrorism: Reflections on the Controversial Conjunction," National meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Philadelphia, PA, Nov. 19-22, 2005

"Using Non-horses to Show that Horses are not Horses: Conflict, Complement, and Yin-Yang Duality," invited lecture, Department of Theater and Dance, Appalachian State University, Nov. 17, 2005

"She Has Your Mother's Eyes: Hindu Iconolatry and the Compensatory Nature of *Darsan*," National meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Rochester, NY, Nov. 4-6, 2005

"The Religion of Terrorism, the Terrorism of Religion," National meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Rochester, NY, Nov. 4-6, 2005

Consultant, *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, New Brunswick, NJ, August 10-17, 2005.

Moderator, "Defensive Splitting and the Practice of Othering," Psychoanalysis, the Iraq War, and the Prospects for a Lasting Peace Conference, University of South Carolina, May 13-15, 2005

"Communities in (Sacrificial) Crisis: Religion and the Violent Redistribution of Chance," Communities in Crisis Conference, University of South Carolina, April 3-5, 2005

"Of 'And' and 'Of': The Politics of Grammar and the Study of Religion," Southeast regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Winston-Salem, NC, Mar. 11-13, 2005

"Religion and Terrorism: Controversies, Apologies, and Analyses," invited lecture, Professional Society of International Studies, University of South Carolina, Jan. 25, 2005

"I Love You, I Hate You: Hindu Devotion and the Vicissitudes of Object Representation," National meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Kansas City, MO, Oct. 22-24, 2004

"Do You Feel Lucky? Well, Do Ya, Punk? Postmodernism as Sacrificial Crisis and the Violent Redistribution of Chance," Mid-Atlantic regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Baltimore, MD, Mar. 18-19, 2004

"Female Parthenogenesis, Scatology, and the New Psychology of Hinduism," National South Asia Conference, Madison, Wisconsin, Oct. 20-23, 2003

Respondent – Religion in Asia II, Mid-Atlantic regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion, New Brunswick, NJ, Mar. 13-14, 2003

“On the Death of the Pilgrim: The Postcolonial Hermeneutics of J. L. Mehta,” National meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Toronto, Ontario, Nov. 19-22, 2002

“On *Viraha Bhakti*: The Contemporary Ethical Implications of a Classical Hindu Theme,” National meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Toronto, Ontario, Nov. 19-22, 2002

“On Greek Heroes, Jewish Nomads, and Hindu Pilgrims: The Work of Ethnotropes in the Contemporary Comparative Philosophy of Religion,” Mid-Atlantic regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Baltimore, MD, Mar. 14-15, 2002

“Vrtra and Ganesa on Freud’s Couch: Psychoanalysis and the Hindu Fantasy of Rejection,” Mid-Atlantic regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Baltimore, MD, Mar. 14-15, 2002

“Reporting the Tradition: J. L. Mehta’s Postmetaphysical Interpretation of Hinduism,” Mid-Atlantic regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion, New Brunswick, NJ, Mar. 15-16, 2001

“The Benev(i)olent Goddess: Kali Iconography in A/theological Perspective,” Mid-Atlantic regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion, New Brunswick, NJ, Mar. 15-16, 2001

“The Generative/Degenerative Matrix: The Hindu Goddess and Postmodernism,” East/West: Points of Contact, Lycoming College, Williamsport, PA, Mar. 15-17, 2001

Courses prepared and taught

Hinduism

Women and the Divine Feminine in Hindu India

Hindu Tantra & Sexuality

Hindu Culture and Religious Experience in Psychoanalytical Perspective

Peoples and Cultures of India

Method and Theory in the Study of Religion

Psychology of Religion

Biology of Religion

Parasitology of Religion

Religion and Violence

Introduction to World Religions

Introduction to Asian Religions

Orientalism, Postcolonialism, and Religion

Modern Cross-cultural Religious Thought

Asian Religions in Society and Popular Practice

Teaching and Research Interests

Hindu religious and philosophical traditions

South Asian Buddhist religious and philosophical traditions

Methods and theories in the academic study of religion

Psychology and psychoanalysis of religion
Biology of religion
Parasitology of Religion
Religion and violence
Religion, ethnopsychiatry, and mental health
Religion and psychoneuroimmunology
Psychoanalytic anthropology
Comparative philosophy of religion

Fellowships, Grants, and Awards

Nominee for the William C. Strickland Outstanding Young Faculty Award in the Appalachian State University College of Arts and Sciences, Fall 2010
Nominee for the William C. Strickland Outstanding Young Faculty Award in the Appalachian State University College of Arts and Sciences, Fall 2008
General Education Curriculum Grant, Appalachian State University, 2008
Wabash Center Grant for the Study of Religion in the South (2007-2008)
Who's Who Among American Teachers and Educators, 2006-2007
Common Learning Agenda Grant, Bucknell University, 2003
University of Pennsylvania School of Arts and Sciences Dissertation Year Fellowship 2000-2001
Education Fellowship, University of Pennsylvania, 1998
Writing Across the University Fellow, University of Pennsylvania, 1997
Briton Martin Fellowship 1996
Research Assistant to Romila Thapar, Spring 1996
American Institute of Indian Studies Fellowship 1995
Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship 1995
Elizabeth Dodge Clark Award in Religion, University of South Carolina, 1992
Vedanta Society of Southern California Research Scholarship, 1992

Languages

Sanskrit – expert research skills
Tamil – moderate fluency
German – reading knowledge
French – reading, writing, and speaking knowledge

Professional memberships

American Academy of Religion
North American Association for the Study of Religion
Society for the Scientific Study of Religion
International Society for Human Ethology
Association for Asian Studies
Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy
Theta Alpha Kappa Honor Society for Religious Studies

Academic service (Appalachian State University)

University of North Carolina Faculty Assembly
Faculty Grievance Hearing Committee

Annual Alumni Award Committee
Department Personal Committee
Promotion and Tenure Committee (chair)
Curriculum Committee (chair)
Assessment Committee (chair)
Planning Committee (chair)
Global Studies Faculty / Academic Advisory Officer
South Asian Studies Committee